DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 986 CE 046 779

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TITLE Integrated Rural Education Centres (IRECs) as Basis of Vocationalization at Primary School Level: The Southern Sudanese Experience.
INSTITUTION London Univ. (England). Inst. of Education.
PUB DATE May 86
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Vocationalising Education Conference (London, England, May 7-9, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Support; Developing Nations; Economic Development; Elementary Education; *Elementary Schools; Foreign Countries; Job Training; *Parent Participation; *Rural Development; *Rural Education; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Sudan

ABSTRACT

In 1977, the government of the Sudan launched the Integrated Rural Development Project with the aim of ruralizing and vocationalizing primary school education. Integrated Rural Education Centres (IRECs) were the first attempt by the government to introduce vocational subjects as part of general education at the primary school level. Unfortunately, the objectives of ruralization and vocationalization were not significantly attained. A major problem was lack of community support and acceptance. Parents' initial perception of IREC schools as preparation for post-primary education and acquisition of good jobs in the modern sector changed. They became convinced the new syllabus was designed to prepare children for vocations in the rural sector. Their resistance took the form of withdrawal of students, passive participation in IREC extension work, and irregular attendance at IREC community meetings and activities. The integrative and coordination concept of IRECs was also found to be weak. Other constraints that militated against acceptance of vocational courses were the restricted nature of the labor market and its prevailing rigid qualifications for employment and poor opportunities for self-employment. (YLB)

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ED280986

VOCATIONALISING EDUCATION CONFERENCE

7-9 May, 1986

INTEGRATED RURAL EDUCATION CENTRES (IRECs) AS BASIS OF VOCATIONALIZATION AT PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL: THE SOUTHERN SUDANESE EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT:

In 1977 the Government of the Sudan launched the 'Integrated Rural Development Project (IRECs)with the aim of ruralizing and vocationalizing primary school education. A World Bank loan set the stage for the project and UNESCO was appointed as the implementing agency. In spite of the World Bank loan, Sudan Government support and UNESCO experts involvement, there has been no significant attainments of these objectives.

The following article, based on research findings in the project area, attempts to highlight some of the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the policy and raises some issues pertaining to education and rural development. Although, a number of constraints; financial, material, training problems, and communication may be identified, planners must not forget that what goes on in the school is determined by what is happening in the wider society which has long ordained the attitudes of the individual and the community and their aspirations. Vocationalisation has a chance of success if implemented within the context of individual and community needs and aspirations; narrower wage differentials, better labour market prospects and a preceding diversification of economic development in the rural areas.

JACK J. NGALUMU

INTEGRATED RURAL EDUCATION CENTRES (IRECs) AS BASIS OF VOCATIONALIZATION AT PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL: THE SOUTHERN SUDANESE EXPERIENCE.

In 1975, the Government of the Sudan launched an Education Sector Review Commission to survey the state of education in the country in relation to it's relevance to the development needs and to recommend guidelines for its future development. The outcome of the review's report published in 1977, was entitled, "Sudanese Education: An Appraisal and Strategy for Action."

One of the Review's main recommendations was the ruralization and introduction of Vocational subjects in primary education system through an integrated and development approach. Hence the Integrated rural Education Centres recommended in the Review could be seen as the first attempt by a Sudanese government to introduce vocational subjects as part of its 'general education' at the primary school level. (6-12 yrs.)

The project upon which this article is based was launched in 1977 in the Maridi District of the Southern Sudan. However, after almost nine years of its commencement one might now ask, 'what has become of these novel ideas and efforts? what progress has been made towards achieving the objectives and how popular are these subjects among parents and pupils?

The central point of discussion is the acceptability of the new IRECs curriculum. In this paper, I examine some of the likely problems which faced the implementation of the new IRECs curriculum in the primary schools and the response of parents to it. The evidence presented here pertains to a research carried out by the author in the Southern Sudan between November 1984 and September 1985. Data analysis is still at a primary stage.

However, before presenting some preliminary findings, it is necessary briefly to examine the type of curriculum operating in conventional primary schools and the attitude and reasons for the attitude of parents and pupils to the old primary school curriculum.

PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM:

Generally, in developing countries, mass school systems in the early twentieth century usually began by creating aspirations in parents and their children for better jobs, better standards of living and higher social status which could only be achieved through the means of an academically oriented education.

Habib (1983:184) describing the many characteristics of Sudanese education system informs that 'the most salient and surcharged feature of the Sudanese education system is its emphatic upward thrust'. No level below tertiary is terminal. Each of the three lower levels is a rung on the upward ladder. The emphasis is on formal schooling which pupils and their parents view mainly as the means to obtaining modern sector jobs."

In the absence of 'terminal school policy', the schools follow a curriculum of the prototype kind which was in use during the colonial era, with little scope for adaptation to the local environment and special needs of the rural community. Kinunda (1981:23) noted that 'apart from the usual academic-oriented and traditional subjects like Mathematics, English, Sciences, geography, History and Arabic, no practical situations such as agriculture, rural crafts, carpentry,

smiths and masonry are provided in the primary schools.'

Kinunda (1981) contends that learning of the subject matter dominates in all primary schools and depends largely on memorization of facts without involving the children in observation, application, demonstration, analysis or problem solving techniques. The children therefore complete their primary education ill-prepared for a productive and active life in the rural areas where the majority of them have to spend their life. In a sense, the Curriculum does not give them the Basic Knowledge, life skills and attitudes to enable them to be self-reliant and productive citizens after leaving school. This point has been reinforced by the type of examination which is biased towards urban children and geared to the acquisition of white-collar jobs in the modern sector of the economy.

The criticism of primary school curriculum as being irrelevant (Ngalamu, J. 1979) has been in the Vogue in the last few decades. Despite these criticisms, teachers, parents and pupils appear strongly in favour of the academic subjects to the exclusion of vocational subjects in primary schools despite colossal failures due to poor performance of pupils, high dropout rates and increasing unemployment among primary school leavers. One is led to believe that for the parents to criticise the academic oriented curriculum and yet refuse to accept vocationalization, the reasons must be deep rooted and stubborn as well.

The ingrained attitude and resentment to vocationalization among parents and their children is not a recent phenomenon in the Sudan. In 1935 it was reported that there was a general decrease in the number of pupils attending technical and trade schools. The report (Sudan Government, 1935) stated that in 1935, 36 boys joined the trade school as compared with 100 in the previous year. This was said to be the result of a policy adopted by the Colonial administration to educate pupils for rural life by introducing carpentry, brick laying, masonry and other vocations in schools. (the type of staff IRECs attempted to do).

Retrospectively, both parents and pupils did not opt for such jobs because these jobs did not compare adequately with what Europeans offered to themselves. Nor did they command salaries equal to those commanded by graduates from academic intermediate schools. The employment and salary structure favoured the academic schools and hence discouraged the promotion of technical and trade schools in the Southern Sudan in the early years. These schools and what they had to offer were generally viewed as of low status and carried less prestige.

Furthermore, some parents saw it as a political expediency, designed to keep their children out of the European dominated and better paid jobs. This attitude has not been relinquished after independence, if anything it has been strengthened. For one reason, in the post independence era, there has emerged a National Bourgeoisie who replaced the European elite group hence maintaining the status quo.

Dove (1980) pointed out that vocational schools the world over have nearly always had difficulties in recruitments due to the communities rejection of the low status occupations and unattractive style of life which they considered such training led. It would therefore appear that the great value parents have placed on academic subjects and the status of the occupations and white collar jobs to which academic subjects lead has proved to be one of the main reasons for rejection of an educational curriculum which advocates introduction and implementation of vocational courses in the schools.

IRECs CURRICULUM:

The solutions to rural-urban migration, unemployment and rural transformation were seen in the development and implementation of an environmentally oriented and community based curriculum (ED-82/WS/55/1982) of the type adopted by IBECs

project. It was believed that once the curriculum has been implemented effectively, the products would acquire an educational base which would make them effective participants in rural transformation through acquisition of various vocational skills, curb on rural-urban migration and lead to self-employment thus easing unemployment.

The school activities and skills to be provided, were to be related to the pupil's own surroundings and conditions of life as far as practicable and compatible with the physical and mental development of the children in terms of the facilities and resources available in the location. The emphasis was to be on primary schools in order to improve the quality of rural life (ED-82/WS/55/1982).

The project document (ED-82/WS/55/82) emphasised that education should be brought into closer contact with other sectors of the economy such as agriculture, industry, community development and cooperative enterprises. The schools should become centres where both formal and non-formal educational activities are integrated as a community but also play a central role as 'centres of change in the society.'

In the "Sudanese Education - An appraisal and Strategy for Action" (1977), the IRECs was described as 'Model primary school whose educational services are extended to the young and whose enlightening and vocational activities are directed to adults and to the surrounding community. (FIT/507/SUD/10- UNESCO, 1982, p.8).

In view of the above a new curriculum was designed and implemented in some schools in Maridi district between 1979 and 1982. It was reported (IRECs Primary School Syllabus, 1982) that it was necessary to change traditional subjects such as Geography, History and Civics into a new integrated concept of Social Studies. Subjects like Home Economics, Rural Education, Arts and Crafts had been incorporated into Operating a Household or Earning a Living. It was claimed that over 90 per cent of the old curriculum had been incorporated in the new syllabus. Without going into the details of curriculum design and implementation, one will doubt whether the fusion of the old with the new would not lead to the perpetuation of the ingrained attitude of upward thrust and subsequent career requisition in the modern sector of the economy.

The aims of the Central Government for education expressed in the Five Year Plan for the nation, 1972-1977, became 'the diversification of higher secondary education and achievement of a balance between academic education on the one hand and technical and vocational training on the other. The percentage ratio was envisaged as 60 per cent and 40 per cent respectively (Major Trends in Education, 1975).

Hence the implementation of IRECs curriculum at primary school level was perceived to correspond with the official Government policy for secondary schools and should provide further opportunities for primary school children through vocational education.

A programme of training and retraining of conventional primary school teachers was undertaken to orientate the teachers to the new ideas of IRECs. This was accomplished through cycles of in-service and pre-service trainings, seminars, workshops and on the job training. However, the training sessions were so short that one would doubt their effectiveness in permanent orientation of teachers.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS:

One can only speculate about conclusions and some of the generalizations provided here, but it seems clear that any Curriculum or innovation for that matter would require Community support and acceptance if it is to be effective as an instrument of change.

The main point at stake is perception of objectives by different groups involved, individual and community aspirations, planners versus clients. There is need to harmonize objectives and aspirations to suit all the groups involved. A task not easy to accomplish. Hawes (1978:18) noted that for most times 'what the educational planners believe is good for the community as a whole is not what the individual child and his parents believe is good for him.' This is, but, one example of the many conflicting interests which has posed immense problems to educational planners in implementing educational reforms.

For instance the experience gained from IRECs showed a similar pattern. Parents were initially enthusiastic about the project. They participated effectively when asked to erect poultry sheds, contribute chickens for the school poultry farm and attend demonstration sessions on agriculture and other rural development activities. But when the project began to make more demands on their pupils in terms of extra work in school gardens, bringing hoes and spaces from home to school parents resented. They reacted by collecting their chickens back to their old folds and refused to provide grains as chicken feeds.

At Naam, the official IRECs school enrollment began to decrease. In 1984, there were 87 students enrolled and in 1985, at the time of fieldwork, enrollemnt had dropped by half (44). Two things were noted. First, parents in this area prefer to send their children 4 miles to a traditional primary school run by UNHCR at Affaf. Secondly, parents generally refer to IRECs primary school as "an agricultural school." A connotation which carries the same implications as that which affected traditional schools in the past. (1935).

At Beki er Ruda, it was noted that when parents learnt that their children were to take a terminal examination that would not lead to intermediate school entrance, they protested with vigour and asked the authorities concerned to alter the scheme. Parents at Naam have not yet been told about the terminal nature of IRECs, but resentment has begun to emerge .

Communities around IREC: schools all appear to associate or perceive IRECs initially as "general education" leading to post primary education and of course eventually to acquisition of good jobs in the modern sector. This position has changed. Parents are now convinced that the new syllabus was designed to prepare their children for a vocation in the rural area rather than in the urban sector. At the moment resistance is mild, taking the forms of withdrawals of children from IRECs schools, passive participation in IRECs extension work, and irregular attendances at IRECs community-meetings and activities.

It was also apparent that the integrative and co-ordination concept of IRECs was equally found to be weak. Teachers of IRECs were expected to co-ordinate their activities with other development and government agencies and act as intermediaries between aid and government agencies and rural people on one hand. However, evidence from field data suggest that parents more often by-pass the less professional teachers and prefer to go directly to those who have the technical know-how in matters concerned with special needs such as agriculture, health and other technical matters. In a sense parents reject the involvement of teachers in matters outside the school, which they assume would waste time and lead to failure of their children in final examinations. Parents too reject practical work in IRECs schools claiming that their children were too young to cultivate. Some educated parents argued at this stage pupils should concentrate their efforts on learning how to read and write. They however, support the introduction of vocational courses at intermediate and secondary school levels. Though this may appear more as a protective and causal statement as further evidence may suggest.

At secondary school level, there is substantial evidence to indicate some form of resistance It is a common practice in the Southern Sudan, for parents to transfer their children from Technical Secondary schools to academic ones. Despite government rules and directives to headmasters to stop such transfers,

transfers have continued unimpeded. Parents appear to associate technical schools and therefore vocational courses with hardship through manual labour, which command less respect. More often too, the graduates of such technical schools and vocational courses belong to the supportive and subordinate staff than administrative class.

On the other hand, administrative staff apart from enjoying lucrative conditions of service and general access to scarce resources, seem to benefit from other advantages associated with administrative work which are not often available to the technicians and fieldworkers. Such amenities include transport facilities, housing, incentives and other privileges.

The general conclusion to be reached is that technical and vocational courses in the Southern Sudan have been associated with psychological inferiority of low status, low pay, working with hands, getting dirty, receiving and obeying orders. These things are far from integrated into traditional mentality of perceiving a livelihood for educated people. It is precisely this attitude which has long since determined the type of education parents want for their children.

It was equally apparent from evidence gathered during the fieldwork that 'Community's felt needs' play a significant role in acceptance or rejection of a curriculum. In this context, the IRECs curriculum was seen as not meeting the communities long term socio-economic and psychological needs nor providing greater opportunities for their children to advance beyond the local IRECs primary school. Other studies elsewhere seem to arrive at the same conclusion (see Foster P. & Sheffield, 1974; Nash 1962).

It is not surprising that by 1984 all IRECs activities have stopped functioning. The expected number of IRECs schools to reach a maximum of 80 in the Southern had barely progressed beyond 4 schools, even then only one school was officially in operation during the research period. The main reason through could be claimed to be lack of funds, when the project expired in 1982. There is a strong reason to support the contention that community rejection of the system played a very central role. Parents and teachers have all come to know that possession of knowledge and numerical skills through the traditional school system (after all, the current ruling elits are products of the old school system and this in itself is a proof of a successful system) represents the only way to better status, higher income employment and positions of political power in the modern sector.

Another constraint which effectively militated against acceptance of vocational courses (IRECs) was the restricted nature of the labour Market and its prevailing rigid qualifications for employment. In a sense the link between the labour market and primary education could be said to be so powerful as to undermine any attempts to introduce vocational courses alongside the traditional school syllabus.

In the Southern Sudan, where industrialization has leas been achieved as alternative employment opportunities, government service remains the only source of employment which bases its employment criteria on paper qualifications. Individual ability is measured against academic subject passes relevant to the job in question. It can therefore be argued that parents and their children are left without any alternative choices to achieve their objectives but to compete for the few available places in the government service through the academic oriented schools.

Lastly, one of the justifications for introducing vocational courses in primary schools is to provide opportunities for self-employment. But self-employment has to ultimately depend on a number of factors such as availability and size of the market, demand capacity and a sizeable population with spendable money; vocations such as carpentry, smiths and masonry, need to be located where there are other service enterprises like garages, workshops and repair concerns. It is then that initiative in the form of self-employment can be effectively translated into reality.

In the absence of these coupled with an inherently poor population (peasantry) as the case is in Maridi district, self-employment has no chances of take-off and becoming prosperous to be an attractive alternative.

CONCLUSION:

The preceding analysis points to the need to take account of 'individual' and "community" aspirations and generally felt needs, when introducing alternative educational strategies. The existing relationships between education (formal) and a restricted labour market are so rigid and strong to be easily broken without significant changes in the existing socio-economic structures and attitudes held.

The main issues may still be found in wage differentials, size of the modern sector, employment opportunities, level of rural development in terms of education and technology, location of small service industries in rural areas, markets, and market viability and more importantly community's perception of long term economic development prospects in rural areas. In this context vocational skills may not be the main constraints nor their introduction in schools or acceptability by the parents, but the fact that their effectiveness will be determined by these other forces.

IRECs as an educational project would be too ambitious in its objectives if it were to deal with the aforesaid factors. In this circumstance IRECs did not foster the right conditions for acceptance of its curriculum. At the end IRECs emerged like many other projects before it as a symbol of discrimination and failed to rally the support of the clientele.

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